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BOOK REVIEWS.

AN ESSAY ON LAUGHTER. Its Forms, its Causes, its Development, and its Value.

By *James Sully*, M. A., LL.D. New York, London, and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1902. Pages, xvi, 441.

When we consider that man is the only animal that laughs we must grant that a philosophical discussion of the form, the causes, the development of the value of laughter treats on one of the most serious and most important questions; and the author, Prof. James Sully, one of the leading psychologists, is fully aware of the gravity of his subject. Man has been defined as a tool-making animal, as a speaking animal, a reasoning animal, and a laughing animal. Does that not indicate that the faculty of laughter is of equal dignity with man's rationality, his language, and his industrial ability?

Professor Sully is "ready to challenge the wisdom claimed by the out-and-out sticklers for seriousness," the agelast (*ἀγέλαστος*), the laughter-hater (*μισόγελως*). He quotes Pascal without endorsing him, "*Diseur de bon mots, mauvais caractère*." The friend of laughter (*ὁ φιλόγελως*) has always existed and, claims our author, "we all shrink from the awful imputation' implied in the words 'you have no sense of humor.'"

Professor Sully discusses his subject gravely as behooves a scientist and a scholar. He anticipates the criticism to which he lays himself open for investigating the topic, for to some people all audible laughter is a display of ill-breeding, and Lord Chesterfield congratulated himself that nobody had ever heard him laugh.

The book before us is pretty voluminous, consisting of 432 pages and being divided into twelve chapters. Having called our attention to the fact that a laugh is a bodily act, he warns the reader not to fear allusion "to such unmetaphysical entities as lung and diaphragm," whereupon he proceeds to discuss the nature of the smile and the laugh, which he claims to be identical in all essential details. Tickling is the most common purely bodily cause of provoking laughter, and so a whole chapter is dedicated to its characterisation. We are now prepared to learn something about the physiological basis of laughter concerning which our author says:

"It is conceivable that the disposition to laugh may have its own restricted physiological conditions in a special instability of the mechanism concerned. This again may presumably include some as yet undefinable property of the nerve-centres which favors rapid change in the mode of brain activity, and those sudden collapses of tension which seem to be the immediate physiological antecedent of the motor discharge in laughter."

In the description of the varieties of the laughable (Chapter IV.) and a criticism of the theories of the ludicrous, our author exhibits much learning and sound judgment. Kant and Schopenhauer offer sufficient material and there is no gain-saying Professor Sully's condemnation of their stilted explanations :

"The impressions of the laughable cannot be reduced to one or two principles. Our laughter at things is of various tones. It gathers up into itself a number of primitive tendencies ; it represents the products of widely removed stages of intellectual and moral evolution."

And now Professor Sully proposes his own views and sets forth a summary of his own work :

"It will at once be evident that a large investigation into the origin and development of the laughing impulse will take us beyond the limits of pure psychology. We shall have to consider how the impulse grew up in the evolution of the race ; and this will force us to adopt the biological point of view, and ask how this special group of movements came to be selected and fixed among the characters of our species. On the other hand, laughter is more than a physiological and psychological phenomenon. As hinted above, it has a social significance, and we shall find that the higher stages of its evolution can only be adequately dealt with in their connection with the movement of social progress.

"Lastly, it will be by tracing the evolution of laughter in the human community that we shall best approach the problem of the ideal which should regulate this somewhat unruly impulse of man. Such a study would seem to promise us a disclosure of tendencies by which laughter has been lifted and refined in the past, and by the light of which it may consciously direct itself in the future."

Professor Sully is an evolutionist and so he goes back to the brute to explain the human, and seeking in the lower animals that function which would correspond to the smile of man, discovers it in the display of a lively satisfaction in general. He argues as follows :

"We cannot accept common modes of interpreting the 'mischievous' performances of animals. Many of a monkey's tricks are 'funny' enough ; yet we may seriously doubt whether he enjoys them as practical jokes. His solemn mien certainly does not suggest it ; but then it may be said that human jokers have a way of keeping up an appearance of gravity. A consideration of greater weight is that what looks to us much like a merry joke may be a display of the *teasing* instinct, when this goes beyond the playful limit, and aims at real annoyance or mischief. The remark probably applies to some of the well-known stories of 'animal

humor,' for example, that of Charles Dickens about the raven. This bird, it may be remembered, had to share the garden with a captive eagle. Having carefully measured the length of this formidable creature's chain, he turned to good account the occasion of the giant's sleep by stealing his dinner; and then, the rightful owner having presumably woke up, made an impudent display of eating the same just safely outside the eagle's 'sphere of influence.' This doubtless showed some cunning, and something of spite; but it is not clear that it indicated an enjoyment of the fun of the thing.

"That this teasing and playing of tricks by animals may now and again approach the human attitude of malicious mirthfulness is not improbable. A cat that 'plays' with its captive mouse, half-pretending, as it seems, not to see the small thing's hopeless attempt to 'bolt,' may, perhaps, be enjoying something of the exultant chuckle of a human victor.

"Yet, while we may question the truth of the proposition that these mischievous actions are enjoyed as practical jokes—in the way in which Uncle Remus represents them—we need not hesitate to attribute to animals a simple form of the child's sense of fun. This trait appears most plainly in the pastimes of the young of many familiar species, including our two domestic pets, pastimes which are quite correctly described as animal play.

"Darwin has rightly recognised a germ of our 'sense of humor' in a dog's joining in the game of stick-throwing. You throw a bit of stick for him to fetch, and having picked it up he proceeds to carry it away some distance and to squat down with it on the ground just before him. You then come quite close as if to take the stick from him, on which he seizes it and bears it off exultingly, repeating the little make-believe with evident enjoyment.

"I have tested a dog again and again when playing with him in this fashion, and have satisfied myself that he is in the play-mood, and knows perfectly well that you are too; so that if you pretend to be serious and to command him in your most magisterial voice to give up the stick he sidles up with a hollow show of obedience which could impose on nobody, as if to say, 'I know better: you are not really serious; so I am going on with the game.'

"G. J. Romanes relates that he had a dog who went some way towards qualifying himself for the office of clown. This animal would perform a number of self-taught tricks which were clearly intended to excite laughter. 'For instance, while lying on his side and violently grinning, he would hold one leg in his mouth.' Under these circumstances 'nothing pleased him so much as having his joke duly appreciated, while, if no notice was taken of him, he would become sulky.'

"The anthropoid apes appear both to produce a kind of smile or grin, and to utter sounds analogous to our laughter. It may, however, be contended that this so-called laughter is much less like our laughter than the grin is like our smile."

That laughter is inherited and not due to imitation is shown by the case of "Laura Bridgman, who was shut out by her blindness and deafness from the lead

of companions. She developed these expressions. We must conclude, then, that they are inherited tendencies."

Professor Sully claims priority for the smile; he says:

"It is fairly certain that laughing comes after smiling.

"The first laughter is, like the smile, an expression of pleasure. As Preyer puts it, the laughter is a mere heightening of the look of pleasure. It marks, however, a higher level of agreeable consciousness."

"In the absence of better evidence, the fact that the smile appears first in the life of the child must, according to a well-known law of evolution, be taken as favoring the hypothesis that man's remote ancestors learned to smile before they could rise to the achievement of the laugh. This is further supported by the fact that, in the case of the individual, the laugh when it occurs announces a higher form of pleasurable consciousness, the level of perception as distinguished from the level of sensation which is expressed by the first smile. Lastly, I am informed that among imbeciles the smile persists lower down in the scale of degeneration than the laugh."

The origin of laughter according to Professor Sully would be as follows:

"A baby after a good meal will, I believe, go on performing something resembling sucking movements. The first smiles may have arisen as a special modification of these movements when there was a particularly lively feeling of organic contentment or well-being. I believe, further, that an infant is apt to carry out movements of the mouth when food is shown to it. A similar tendency seems to be illustrated by the behavior of a monkey which, when a choice delicacy was given it at meal-time, slightly raised the corners of the mouth, the movement partaking of the nature of 'an incipient smile.' Again, our hypothesis finds some support in the fact that, according to Preyer and others, the first smiles of infants were noticed during a happy condition of repletion after a good meal.

"Supposing the smile in its origin to have thus been organically connected with the pleasurable experience of sated appetite, we can easily see how it might get generalised into a common sign of pleasure."

It is perhaps difficult to understand how the lungs and diaphragm can become connected with a smile and how tickling can be the most primitive bodily cause of it, but Professor Sully is ready to produce instances from the animal world; he says:

"A young chimpanzee when tickled for some time under the armpits would roll over on his back showing all his teeth and accompanying the simian grin by defensive movements, just as a child does. A young orang at the Zoölogical Gardens (London) behaved in a very similar way. The young of other animals, too, betray some degree of ticklishness."

At any rate "laughter which accompanies tickling and other closely allied forms of play in children owes its value to its being an admirable way of announcing the friendly playful mood."

But what is tickling? Professor Sully answers.

"Children only laugh in response to tickling when they are in a pleasurable state of mind," and this "seems to confirm the hypothesis that the love of fun, which is at the bottom of tickling and makes it perhaps the earliest clear instance of mirthful play with its element of make-believe, first emerged gradually out of a more general feeling of gladness."

These arguments contain the most original part of the author's contributions to the philosophy of laughter; the rest of the book is devoted to a series of topics which are applications of the author's theory and contain many interesting points; Chapter VII., "On the Development of Laughter During the First Three Years of Life"; Chapter VIII., "The Laughter of Savages"; Chapter IX., "Laughter in Social Evolution"; Chapter X., "Laughter of the Individual: Humor"; Chapter XI., "The Laughable in Art: Comedy"; Chapter XII., "Ultimate Value and Imitations of Laughter." Professor Sully concludes his volume with an expression of fear that laughter might die out (we must consider that the book was written in England at the time and soon after the close of the Boer war), but he puts his trust in the growing volume of what he called "private laughter."

"It is not unlikely that in the future, men who think will grow at once more tenacious of their ideals, and more alive to the ludicrous consequences which these introduce.... If a few men will cultivate their own laughter in this way and do their best to make their private amusement that of an inner circle of friends, we may hope that it will not die—though the death of what we love were less terrible to face than its debasement—but be preserved by a few faithful hands for a happier age. They will have their reward in advance, since pure and honest laughter, like mercy, blesses him that gives, and him that takes."

Is it necessary to add, that with all deference to the serious spirit of our author we do not feel satisfied with his explanations of laughter, fun, and humor. His essay is learned and commands our respect, but having devoted a careful study to his theory we can only repeat what Lotze said of Kant's doctrine of the ludicrous (quoted by Sully, p. 18), that he did not exactly understand why a funny idea should make us *laugh* rather than let us say cough, or sigh, or sneeze. We grant that the sucking movements of lips are made by babies as well as the lower animals when no longer really sucking and that they are accompanied by psychological states that are pleasurable, but they are not the germs from which laughter originates. The pouting of the lips can be observed in infants and children when they are intensely interested, intellectual tasting and testing is accompanied by the physiological symptoms of a material tasting and testing, but pouting never changes into laughing or smiling.

Do not our psychologists and philosophers seek far-fetched explanations for a phenomenon which is easily understood if we only analyse its physiological function and keep clearly in mind the psychical accompaniment? Is not laughing (as set forth in *The Monist*, Jan., 1898, Vol. VIII., No. 2, p. 261) simply a reiterated

shout of triumph? Laughing consists in quickly-repeated ejaculations, it is a heightening of man's activity in expressing his sentiments, a rapid breathing accompanied with vocal sounds, the very reverse to moaning which is a depression of the same condition. Moaning retards breathing and interferes generally with the respiratory organs. While it is true that smiling precedes laughing in the baby, we can see in a smile only the indication of a laugh, a kind of sublimated or spiritualised cachination. Tickling as a provocative of laughter is decidedly of a sensuous nature, indicating as it were the good-natured submission of the conquered one by the successful aggressor, both in combat and in love. This becomes apparent from many of the instances that Professor Sully adduces, especially also when a lady on referring to her childhood and speaking of the enjoyment of "this distinctly agreeable sensation of tickling," remarked that there was in it "a vague suspicion that the pastime was not quite proper." He further calls attention to the fact that is not unusual "of a child's refusal to be tickled by a stranger," and "tickling a child unexpectedly and from an unseen quarter will not provoke laughter."

While we do not agree with Professor Sully's theory of laughter, we confess that the perusal of his book was a genuine pleasure and the details of his discussion are both instructive and entertaining. P. C.

WHY THE MIND HAS A BODY. By *C. A. Strong*, Professor of Psychology in Columbia University. New York: The Macmillan Co.; London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 1903. Pages, x, 355.

GEIST UND KÖRPER, SEELE UND LEIB. Von *Ludwig Busse*, Professor der Philosophie an der Universität Königsberg. Leipzig: Verlag der Dürr'schen Buchhandlung. 1903. Pages, iv, 488. Preis, M. 8.50.

The title of Prof. C. A. Strong's book is somewhat misleading, for it seems to indicate that the author follows some Oriental doctrine of pure spirituality called 'mind,' which is materialised or incarnated by assuming the bodily form of flesh and blood. Mr. Strong is no Vedantist, nor a believer in Mahatmans, but professor of psychology in Columbia University, and the work before us is a purely scientific investigation of the main problem of psychophysics, the relation between the states of consciousness and the functions of the brain.

Professor Strong says: "There are thus three distinct theories as to causal relations between mind and body: interactionism, asserting that the causal influence runs in both directions,—in sensation from the body to the mind, in volition from the mind to the body; automatism, maintaining that it runs in one direction only,—always from the body to the mind; and parallelism, denying all causal influence and holding the relation to be of a different nature." He adds: "From causal theories we must distinguish sharply the 'double aspect theory,' with its assertion of one reality manifesting itself under two diverse forms." This last theory presupposes the theory of panpsychism and apparently appeals to the author as best of all. Says he in the Preface: "That the panpsychist explanation is